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Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 A-01

OPR-02 SY-05 OC-05 CCO-00 OCL-00 SAM-01 /079 W
---------- 067088
P R 141329Z AUG 75
FM AMCONSUL ASMARA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3502
INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON
COMNAVTELCOM WASHDC
CINCEUR VAIHINGEN
COMIDEASTFOR
NAVCOMMUNIT ASMARA
NAVCOMMSTA NEA MAKRI
CNO WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 0693

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS ET
SUBJECT: ASMARA - ADDITIONAL INSURGENT ACTIVITY

REF: NAVCOMMUNIT ASMARA 121415Z AUG 75

1. TWO EVENTS OCCURRING WITHIN TWO DAYS OF ONE ANOTHER GIVE POSSIBLE INDICATION OF FRONT (ELF/PLF) EFFORT TO ESCALATE PRESSURE ON CITY OF ASMARA. ON FRIDAY, AUGUST 8, WORKERS FROM SEDAO (NOW ELPA, ERITREAN REGION) COMMUTING FOR NORMAL SHIFT AT BELEZA PLANT WERE AMBUSHED BY FRONT FORCES 5 KM NORTH OF ASMARA. THREE WORKERS WERE KILLED AND THIRTEEN WOUNDED. ON SUNDAY, AUGUST 10, A BRIDGE ON THE MASSAWA-ASMARA RAILROAD WAS DESTROYED BETWEEN GHINDA AND BARRASA, THUS SEVERING RAIL COMMUNICATION BETWEEN ASMARA AND THE PORT.
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2. AS STATED REFTEL, ELECTRIC POWER SITUATION IS BECOMING PRECARIOUS. THE PRINCIPAL POWER STATION AT BELEZA HAS A CAPACITY OF 25 MEGAWATTS YET IS CURRENTLY GENERATING ONLY 10.5 MEGAWATTS BECAUSE OF DAMAGE CAUSED BY INSURGENTS LAST FEBRUARY. IN DISCUSSION OF ELECTRIC POWER PROBLEMS WITH CONSULATE OFFICER, FONTANA, FORMER GENERAL MANAGER OF SEDAO AND CURRENTLY CONSULTANT TO ELPA ERITREA, STATED THAT REPAIRS TO BELEZA PLANT SHOULD BE COMPLETED BY MID-SEPTEMBER PENDING EXPECTED ARRIVAL OF SPARE PARTS. HE ADDED THAT POWER LINE BETWEEN MASSAWA PLANT (WHICH HAS CAPACITY OF 11 MEGAWATTS) IS BROKEN SOMEWHERE BETWEEN GHINDA AND BELEZA. ELPA REPAIR CREWS HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO RESTORE SERVICE AS POWER LINES CROSS THROUGH FRONT-CONTROLLED COUNTRYSIDE, INTO WHICH WORKERS DO NOT WISH TO VENTURE. SIMILARLY, POWER LINE BETWEEN BELEZA PLANT AND MAJOR RESERVOIR SEVING ASMARA IS ALSO OUT OF SERVICE, AND REPAIR CREWS UNWILLING TO RUN RISK OF ATTEMPTING REPAIRS. WATER SUPPLY TO ASMARA, DISRUPTED OCCASIONALLY IN THE PAST, IS EXPECTED TO BE ADEQUATE FOR IMMEDIATE NEEDS AS PUMPING STATION AT RESERVOIR IS POWERED BY TWO SMALL DIESEL GENERATORS. MAINTENANCE ADEQUATE SUPPLY OF FUEL FOR PUMPING STATION, HOWEVER, MAY PRESENT A PROBLEM AS IT MUST BE CONVOYED.

3. ELECTRIC POWER SITUATION FURTHER COMPLICATED BY FRIDAY ATTACK ON ELPA SHIFT WORKERS. SECURITY SITUATION IS SUCH THAT BELEZA WORKERS CURRENTLY WORKING 24 TO 36-HOUR SHIFTS. TO DATE, FONATANA STATES, EPMG HAS SHOWN LITTLE INTEREST IN PROVIDING SECURITY FOR EITHER BELEZA SHIFT WORKERS OR ELPA REPAIR CREWS. AS POWER COMING FROM BELEZA TO ASMARA IS TRANSMITTED THROUGH ONLY TWO POWER LINES RUNNING THROUGH AREA OF INSURGENT ACTIVITY, FRONT COUND EASILY SEVER EITHER POWER LINE AND THEREBY MAJOR SOURCE OF ELECTRIC POWER TO ASMARA.

4. DESTRUCTION OF BRIDGE ON ASMARA-MASSAWA RAILWAY (WHICH WAS CONFIRMED TO CONSUL GENERAL BY BG WORKU, CO OF EPMG FORCES IN ERITREA) WILL HAVE IMMEDIATE IMPACT ON INDUSTRIAL OPERATION IN ASMARA, BUT LITTLE DIRECT IMPACT ON LIFE OF MOST ASMARA RESIDENTS. IN RECENT WEEKS RAILROAD HAS BEEN USED ALMOST ENTIRELY TO TRANSPORT RAW MATERIALS FROM MASSAWA TO ASMARA'S FACTORIES, AND FINISHED PRODUCTS TO MASSAWA FOR EXPORT. VIRTUALLY NO FOOD
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OF CONSUMER PRODUCTS ARE TRANSPORTED BY RAILROAD. MASSAWA-ASMARA ROAD, ON OTHER HAND, WAS, PRIOR TO JULY 23 TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS, A PRINCIPAL ROUTE FOR FOOD AND CONSUMER ITEMS IN AND OUT OF ASMARA. BY EPMG ORDERS THAT ROAD IS USED NOW ONLY BY CONVOYS BRINGING PETROLEUM PRODUCTS FROM MASSAWA.

5. COMMENT: WHILE CONGEN DOES NOT YET WISH TO DRAW OMINOUS CONCLUSIONS FROM TWO INCIDENTS WHICH MAY PROVE ENTIRELY

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COINCIDENTAL, WE DO CONSIDER THEM NOTEWORTHY AND DESERVING OF CLOSE MONITORING. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT ATTACK ON RAILWAY MAY BE RATIONALIZED BY FRONT AS MEANS OF ECONOMIC STRANGULATION OF ASMARA WHILE CAUSING ONLY MINIMAL IMMEDIATE DISRUPTION TO LOCAL RESIDENTS. IF FRONT, IN FACT, INITIATING CAMPAIGN TO ISOLATE ASMARA, WE WOULD ANTICIPATE FURTHER DISRUPTIVE ACTIONS WITHIN VERY NEAR FUTURE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: GOVERNMENT OVERTHROW, POLITICAL STABILITY, COMBAT OPERATIONS, LIBERATION FRONTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 14 AUG 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ShawDG
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975ASMARA00693
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750281-0478
From: ASMARA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750850/aaaabrtw.tel
Line Count: 123
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ShawDG
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 25 JUN 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <25 JUN 2003 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <12 NOV 2003 by ShawDG>
Review Markings:

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06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ASMARA - ADDITIONAL INSURGENT ACTIVITY
TAGS: PINS, ET, ELF, PLF
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006